

The House of Whispers

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"YOU HEARD WHISPERS?"

Synopsis.—Circumstances having prevented Spaulding Nelson, clerk, from joining the American forces going to France, he is in a despondent mood when he receives an invitation to dinner from his great-uncle, Rufus Gaston. On the way to the house he meets, under peculiar circumstances, a young girl, apparently in trouble, to whom he has an opportunity to be of slight service. She lives in the same apartment building as Rufus Gaston, and he accompanies her to the house. Gaston and his wife are going to Maine for a trip and want to leave Nelson in charge of the apartment. He accepts. Gaston and his wife tell their great-nephew of mysterious noises—"whispers"—which they have heard in the house. On his way to the Gaston apartment the next Sunday Nelson again meets his accidental acquaintance of a few days before, Barbara Bradford. She urges him not to allow the fact of their being acquainted to be known. At the apartment Nelson meets the superintendent, Wick, and instinctively dislikes him. In a wall safe he finds a necklace of magnificent pearls, worth a small fortune. Next day Nelson finds the pearls have disappeared from the wall safe. His first idea of informing the police is not acted upon because of peculiar circumstances. He has been discharged from his position without adequate explanation or reason, and feels himself involved in something of a mystery. He decides to conduct an investigation himself. That night Barbara signals from the window of her apartment, which is opposite his, and they arrange a meeting for next day. In the morning he finds a note in his room, asking him why he had not informed the police of the loss of the jewels. Barbara tells Nelson her sister Claire had some years before made a runaway marriage with an adventurer, from whom she was soon parted, and the marriage had been annulled. Claire is engaged to be married and someone knowing of her escapade has stolen documents concerning the affair from the Bradford apartment.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

"Oh, no, she must never know. Dad did not want her ever told anything about it. We talked it over, Claire and I, and decided to put a personal advertisement in the papers. It simply said, 'Liberal reward and no questions asked for return of important papers.'"

"Were there any answers?"

"Yes and no. One morning there was a second note."

"Delivered like the first?"

"Yes, I found it, too, on the floor of my bedroom. Here it is."

More amazed and perplexed than ever by the growing ramification of the plots of the thieves that seemed to involve us both, I took the paper and read:

"Ten thousand is our price for the papers. Pay it or you'll never marry Thayer."

"Did you go then to meet the man in the park?"

"Not until after I got a third note, more threatening than the first and second. Claire and I talked it over and over, trying to think who could have taken the papers. We only keep two servants now, Sarah and Mary, and they both have been with us since we were children. It could not have been either of them. They think as much of us as our own mother does."

"Do you suppose the man that she married may have learned of your father's death and have returned from France to try to blackmail her?"

"We thought of that. The notes did not come from him. They do not read as if a Frenchman wrote them."

"Who could it be?" I said more to myself than to her.

"Then there was another note," she went on. "It demanded that Claire wear a red carnation and meet the writer in the park and bring ten thousand dollars. That was the time I first met you. Your presence must have frightened them off, for we had no more demands until night before last."

"Did you have ten thousand with you that night I first met you?"

"She shook her head."

"We haven't ten thousand dollars in the world. Outside of our furniture and our jewels and our motor, we have very little. If all the bills we

owe were paid, we'd have almost nothing at all."

"What did you propose doing when you met the man—or men?"

"I didn't know. I was going to try to plead with them to give me the papers. I would have promised anything to have gotten them back."

"But the man—the men—might have harmed you."

She smiled incredulously.

"Hardly. There was little danger of their attacking me there in the park so near the avenue, with people constantly passing, and besides, I carried this."

She reached again into the pocket of her habit and brought forth a vicious-looking automatic.

"It was Dad's," she said. "He taught me to shoot with it, though I don't think either of us thought then there would come a time when I might need it."

"What did the last note say?"

"Here it is."

This was written and folded as the others had been, on the most ordinary kind of writing paper. It read:

"Unless we get the money Wednesday, Thayer gets the papers Thursday. No wedding then for yours. Same bench at six-thirty."

"What can I do about it?"

"I'll go in your place," I suggested.

"Oh, no, I couldn't permit that."

"Let me explain," I hastened to say.

"I'm in this mystery as deep as you are. Only last night I discovered that all the Gaston jewels which had been left in my custody are gone."

"Not stolen!" she cried. "The Gaston pearls!"

"Yes," I replied, "the pearls, too."

"Why, they are worth two hundred thousand dollars, at least. What have you done about it? Have you notified the police?"

"No, as yet I have told no one of the robbery but yourself."

"Why not? You must notify the police at once."

I hesitated. It was hard to explain my actions without telling her the whole miserable story, without admitting to this girl on whom I was most eager to make the best of impressions that I was a young man out of a position, discharged in disgrace. Yet she had given me her confidence. It was only fair to her and to myself that there should be no secrets between us. I began at the beginning. I told her of my coming to New York and how I had seen my great-uncle Rufus only once or twice. I related the departure of Roller and Birge for the war front and told her how eager I had been to go with them. I even went into detail as to the reason I had not gone with them, my debt to the mother.

She did not seem greatly interested in the first part of my narrative but when I began telling of the proposition the Gastons had made to me and of the mysterious warnings each of them had separately given me, I could see her interest kindling.

"There is something wrong in that apartment house," she explained. "We have had nothing but trouble ever since we lived there. I wonder if there is anything in the theory that evil deeds make bad karma, which spreads its effects all about. I know I feel there is a sinister atmosphere about the whole place."

"I'm beginning to feel it, too," I said bitterly.

I told her then of my unexpected and unwarranted discharge without explanation the day before.

"How do you account for it?" she asked perplexedly.

"You must have some enemy, some malicious person, who has spread some terrible tale about you."

"I haven't any enemy in the world," I replied, yet even as I spoke there flashed across my mind the malevolent glance the scar-faced man had given me in the restaurant a few evenings before.

"I wonder," said Miss Bradford thoughtfully, "if the same people who are trying to blackmail us are not trying to involve you with us in some way?"

"Why should they?"

"They may have been watching and have seen you enter the house with me twice. They may think that you and I are friends and that you were there in the park purposely that first time."

"Even so," I replied, "that doesn't explain this."

I pulled from my pocket the note I had found on the floor of my bedroom and showed it to her.

"Where did you get that?" she gasped in astonishment.

"Last night I heard footsteps and whispers. I thought at the time I was dreaming. This morning I found this note on the floor."

"You heard whispers," she cried excitedly, "whispers that seemed to come from up near the ceiling?"

"I thought I heard them. I wasn't sure."

"I know," she said, shuddering. "I've heard them—twice."

We looked at each other despairingly. We both of us realized that we must be surrounded with some potent evil forces working to accomplish our ruin. The motive in the anonymous

letters that Miss Bradford had been receiving had plainly been blackmail. But what was the motive in my own case? Why had someone stolen the Gaston pearls and then in an anonymous letter to me spoken of the theft? I wondered, too, if the successful attempt to discredit me at my place of business had not originated from the same mysterious source.

Was my great-uncle Rufus to blame?

The suspicion of him rose in my mind and would not be downed. I recalled the unusual pretext on which he had sent for me after having paid no attention to my existence for nearly a year. I recalled his curious warning and that of his aged wife. I remembered that they had insisted on leaving the jewels behind against my urgings, and that they had been insistent on my having the combination of the safe. Could it be possible that they also had some grudge against the Bradfords, their neighbors, and in some way had got hold of Claire Bradford's secret?

"I think you said," I asked Miss Bradford, "that your family and the Gastons were not acquainted in any way."

"No," she replied, "we don't know them at all. Why do you ask that?"

"I was wondering if it could be possible that my great-uncle Rufus could have had any hand in all this. He's a queer, secretive old chap."

"It's probable that he and my father might have known each other. Both were in business here in the city for many years. I never remember, though, of hearing Dad speak of him—wait, yes, I did once."

"When was that?"

"It must have been six or eight years ago. There was something in the papers about Mr. Gaston retiring from business."

"What was it he said?" I asked eagerly, wondering if some old feud between the two men might not give us a clue to unravel the web of mystery.

"As nearly as I can recall his words were, 'I see that old pirate Gaston has retired with his ill-gotten gains.'"

"To whom was he talking?"

"I don't remember that, probably some man who was visiting at the house. Dad always used to have a lot of men about."

"Did he say anything else?"

"That's all I remember, but I don't think the Gastons could have anything to do with it. This threatening my sister is more the sort of thing a discharged servant would do."

"Yes," I admitted, "but find the discharged servant. Yours have been with you for years."

"Oh, what are we going to do?" she cried in desperation. "If I don't get those papers back, we'll all be ruined."



Under Ordinary Circumstances I Would Have Hesitated to Examine Them, but Now I Felt No Scruples.

They'll give them to my sister's fiancé. Her engagement will be broken. My mother will die of disgrace and shame."

"Don't be discouraged," I cried, trying to inspire in her a confidence I was far from feeling myself. "This is only Sunday. We have until Wednesday evening. I'll find some way of trapping those rascals and making them surrender those papers. Leave it to me."

In spite of my reassuring words, distress was still written on her countenance. As I debated how best to comfort her, she glanced at her wrist watch and exclaimed:

"I must be going. They'll be alarmed about me if I stay longer."

"When am I to see you again?"

"I don't know. That's hard to arrange. My sister and I are so much together."

"Can't I telephone you?"

"No, that wouldn't do at all. Mother and Claire would both want to know all about it and besides—"

"Besides what?"

"I don't trust that girl at the switchboard. I think she listens to everything that is said."

"They are a prying lot," I admitted, "including Mr. Wick, the superintendent."

"I don't like him a bit."

"Nor I, but we must communicate

with each other somehow. If you find out anything more you must let me know at once. If I learn anything, I'll let you know, and I'm going to discover a lot."

"There's always our window," she suggested, "they are close together. I can signal you when I'm alone, and we can talk."

"I'll be there in my room every evening from ten o'clock on," I said, "waiting to hear from you. I'll put a handkerchief on the sill when I'm there."

"And I'll do the same."

Having reached this understanding, I walked with her to the park entrance within sight of the house. All the way we had been talking over the puzzling circumstances of the anonymous notes and of the strange way in which they had been found on the floor. Miss Bradford had spoken again of the whispers she had heard.

"The voices were vague—just like a ghost's might be," she said.

"Yes," I admitted, "that's what they sounded like. But there aren't any ghosts. If those whispers were real, some human being was making them. I'm going to find out who it was, and when we've learned that, we'll have learned a lot about—"

I hesitated.

"About whom?" she questioned.

"I don't know yet," I answered.

I was wondering about my great-uncle Rufus.

CHAPTER V.

I was determined to let the disappearance of the jewels alone until I had found some way of getting the Bradfords out of their troubles. The key to the mystery surely lay in the notes that had been found on the floor in both apartments. If I could discover how the notes had been put there and who put them there, I would be on the trail of the miscreants.

The placing of the notes indicated the necessity of a confederate in the apartment house. Could it be that one of the employees was in league with the plotters? Was one of the Bradford servants betraying them? Was my aged great-uncle in hiding somewhere, playing malevolent pranks on us? How had that note gotten into my own apartment? Nobody had access to the place but myself—yes, and Mrs. Burke, my great-aunt's trusted old laundress. I determined to return to the apartment and lie in wait for her until she came in to do up my room. In the week that I had lived there I had not even laid eyes on her, although each evening when I came in I found my bed neatly made.

While I awaited her arrival I busied myself with studying anew the different rooms in the apartment, hoping ever to find some new clue to the methods by which the anonymous notes had been delivered. I went to the back of the house and looked out of the rear windows. An ornamental ledge of stone, perhaps eighteen inches wide ran along apparently on the level of the flooring. Any agile person might easily have crept along it if they dared risk falling six stories to the ground, but there was no means of access to it save from either my bedroom or the sitting room or from the corresponding rooms in the Bradford apartment. Certainly no one from my apartment had been flipping mysterious notes into the other apartment. Could the converse be true? Was there some unbalanced person in the Bradford family who was doing it? Could it be one of the servants, or possibly Claire Bradford? She always had been flighty, according to her sister's description. Had her troubles unbalanced her to such an extent that she was playing mysterious hysterical pranks on all of us?

I sat down at my uncle's desk. The pigeonholes crammed full of papers caught my eye. Under ordinary circumstances I would have hesitated to examine them, but now I felt no scruples. Old Rufus had warned me that there was some mystery about the place. The pearls had strangely disappeared. I faced the accusation of having stolen them. Surely I was entitled to examine anything and everything in my efforts at solving the mystery.

Pigeonhole after pigeonhole I examined without result until at last I came to a little leather-covered diary. I read it with interest, noting that it was for the present year and that the last entry had been made only the day before he had departed for Maine. About six weeks previous to the present date I found this amazing entry:

"Heard whispers last night."

A week later there was another entry. "Whispers again." There could be no question as to what he meant. The ghostly noises that had been heard by both Miss Bradford and myself had been heard by him, too. No wonder the old man had been so terrified. Other entries in the book recorded hearing the whispers at intervals of about one week.

Nelson and Barbara agree to meet frequently.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

BIG CROPS ASSURED IN WESTERN CANADA

Need of Farm Labor Urgently Required for Harvest.

Rains of the past week which have been general throughout all portions of Western Canada, covering MANITOBA, SASKATCHEWAN, and ALBERTA, have placed beyond all manner of doubt the certainty of vast grain crops throughout the entire district.

Reports from all points indicate marvelous and rapid growth. The conditions of a week or so back, which were decidedly less promising and led many to think that there might be a partial failure, have disappeared altogether and now there is a wave of optimism circulating throughout the entire country.

In 1915 there were enormous yields reported from all parts, and it would appear now as if in many places the yields of 1915 would be equalled if not beaten.

What might appear to be a drawback, is the apparent shortage of farm help. The Province of Manitoba through its Employment Bureau in Winnipeg, is asking for 10,000 harvest hands and over, offering from \$5 to \$6 per day. The Province of Saskatchewan is asking for 15,000 extra hands to take care of the immense harvest that is certain to be reaped in that Province. In Alberta the crop area is somewhat less, the labor conditions somewhat better, and is making a request for 5,000 extra farm hands.

Interviewing the officials of the different Governments, they are inclined to the opinion that as the crops in Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Illinois and other Central States are harvested there will be a movement northward that will materially help to take care of the labor situation. With the low railroad rates that may be secured on application to the Employment Offices at Winnipeg and at boundary points, or which may be secured through the Canadian Government Offices at Chicago, Ill.; Detroit, Mich.; Milwaukee, Wis.; Kansas City, Mo.; Omaha, Neb.; Des Moines, Ia.; Watertown, S. D.; St. Paul, Minn., and Grand Forks, N. D., will give to those seeking employment the opportunity to reach the harvest fields at a low cost.—Advertisement.

Or an Outside Nail.

He had bought a house. It had been such a bargain that he couldn't risk waiting till his fiancée saw it.

But she was delighted to hear the news and questioned him eagerly about it.

"How many clothes closets are there Henry," she demanded.

"There are six," replied the man, proudly.

"But that's hardly enough, Henry."

"What do you want with more than six closets? That's enough to hang your clothes in, is it not?"

"Yes, dear," replied the maiden, firmly. "But you'll want part of one for your clothes, won't you, Henry?"

Important to Mothers

Examine carefully every bottle of CASTORIA, that famous old remedy for infants and children, and see that it

Bears the Signature of *Dr. J. C. Fletcher* In Use for Over 30 Years. Children Cry for Fletcher's Castoria

How He Knew.

Weeks—The man who tries to change a woman's views is a fool.

Weeks—How do you know?

Weeks—My wife told me so.—Stray Stories.

Presidents Washington, Madison, Jackson, Polk and Buchanan were childless.

Back Lame and Achy?

Housework is too hard for a woman who is half sick, nervous and always tired. But it keeps piling up, and gives weak kidneys no time to rest. If your back is lame and achy and your kidneys irregular; if you have "blue spells," sick headaches, nervousness, dizziness and rheumatic pains, use Doan's Kidney Pills. They have done wonders for thousands of worn out women.

A Kansas Case

Mrs. L. A. Perrine, Phillipsburg, Kansas, says: "I had a terrible dull ache across my kidneys. My back was so sore and weak I could hardly stoop over. I was subject to dizzy spells that blurred my sight. The action of my kidneys was very frequent and annoyed me, too. I saw Doan's Kidney Pills advertised and used some. They gave me instant relief. Two boxes cured me."



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